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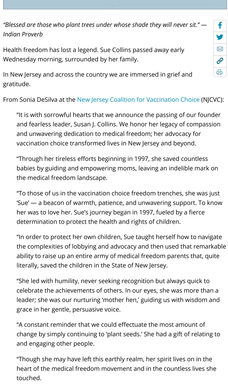
Honoring Sue Collins: New Jersey's 'Unsung Health Freedom Hero'

Sue Collins, founder of the New Jersey Coalition for Vaccination Choice, died Wednesday. Sue's personal mission to work tirelessly to preserve the right to make our own medical decisions became the philosophy of the coalition and a model for health freedom advocacy in New Jersey.

BY ANN TOMOKO ROSEN



"Blessed are those who plant trees under whose shade they will never sit." — Indian Proverb

Health freedom has lost a legend. Sue Collins passed away early Wednesday morning, surrounded by her family.

In New Jersey and across the country we are immersed in grief and gratitude.

From Sonia DeSilva at the New Jersey Coalition for Vaccination Choice (NJCVC):

> "It is with sorrowful hearts that we announce the passing of our founder and fearless leader, Susan J. Collins. We honor her legacy of compassion and unwavering dedication to medical freedom; her advocacy for vaccination choice transformed lives in New Jersey and beyond.
>
> "Through her tireless efforts beginning in 1997, she saved countless babies by guiding and empowering moms, leaving an indelible mark on the medical freedom landscape.
>
> "To those of us in the vaccination choice freedom trenches, she was just Sue' — a beacon of warmth, patience, and unwavering support. To know her was to love her. Sue's journey began in 1997, fueled by a fierce determination to protect the health and rights of children.
>
> "In order to protect her own children, Sue taught herself how to navigate the complexities of lobbying and advocacy and then used that remarkable ability to raise up an entire army of medical freedom parents that, quite literally, saved the children in the State of New Jersey.
>
> "She led with humility, never seeking recognition but always quick to celebrate the achievements of others. In our eyes, she was more than a leader; she was our nurturing 'mother hen,' guiding us with wisdom and grace in her gentle, persuasive voice.
>
> "A constant reminder that we could effectuate the most amount of change by simply continuing to 'plant seeds.' She had a gift of relating to and engaging other people.
>
> "Though she may have left this earthly realm, her spirit lives on in the heart of the medical freedom movement and in the countless lives she touched.
>
> "May Sue's legacy of patience, perseverance and advocacy continue to illuminate our path as we carry forward her mission to safeguard vaccination choice freedom in our state. She was the heart of it all.
>
> "A world with Sue in it was a much better, kinder, more intelligent world. Rest in peace, dear Sue, knowing that your impact will echo through the ages, inspiring generations to come."

Our unsung hero

Before the Health Freedom Movement had Robert F. Kennedy Jr. or Del Bigtree — before there was a "movement" at all — New Jersey had Sue, holding the line without fanfare.

If you have a religious exemption in New Jersey, you owe Sue Collins a debt of gratitude. We all do. Sue was paving the way before most of us were even aware of any threat to informed consent.

As the founder of the NJCVC, Sue created a safe space to explore and support vaccination choice.

She worked tirelessly to preserve our right to make medical decisions regardless of whether she agreed with those decisions. Her personal mission became the philosophy of NJCVC and a model for health freedom advocacy in New Jersey.

> "NJCVC works to cultivate relationships with all people based on respect. We believe that conversations about vaccination choice are possible with everyone. We advocate for people to educate themselves on the complexities of this conversation to allow for dynamic conversations that can evolve over time.
>
> "We strive to build relationships of mutual respect and continued connections. NJCVC realizes that vaccination choice is not an easy conversation for many people in the public eye and respects that it can take time for people to settle into the details and realize that its not as simple as many others want them to believe."

She really believed this. And she lived by it.

Sue embodied the Buddhist principle of joyful effort and mastered the art of "showing up." She did this over and over for 25+ years, never giving up on respectful conversations with lawmakers. She built bridges and fostered relationships.

As an environmentalist, a gardener and a nature lover, Sue understood cultivation. She knew the value of deep roots and a strong foundation and she planted seeds often and everywhere, returning regularly to nourish them.

Sue's faith in the ability to change minds with truth and compassion was unshakeable. She didn't need a stage or a microphone. Her favorite "platforms" were living rooms, backyards and anyplace good conversations could happen. She made advocacy accessible. She created a point of entry for everyone. She held our clumsy hands and gave us courage.

A tree grows in Trenton

Her optimism and perseverance proved contagious. Thanks in large part to the relentless grassroots efforts of NJCVC, thousands of informed parents were prepared to show up and fight to preserve New Jersey's religious exemption at what became known as the Battle of Trenton 2.0.

It wasn't a fight for her. I never saw her fight. Preserving health freedom was a labor of love, and that was something that could be deeply felt by parents and legislators alike.

We will miss her, not just because she was a leader in health freedom, but because she was a friend to nature and humanity — a beautiful, full-spectrum human being who showed us how to use our gifts to enhance our lives on all fronts.

And we will honor her by doing our best to live by what we've learned.

Thank you, Sue. You are so loved. We will keep planting seeds in your memory.

Originally published on Ann Tomoko Rosen's On Second Thought Substack page.

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COMMUNITY FORUM
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Ann Tomoko Rosen is co-founder of The Center for Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine in Westfield, NJ.

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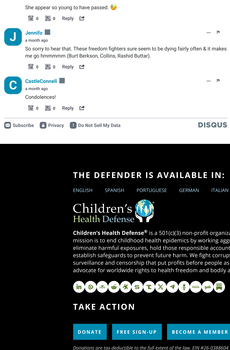
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Best
Newest
Oldest
Barbara Wreesmann
a month ago
who will continue this important work
Reply
dlg3
a month ago
Prayers for Sue and her Family
Reply
Judith
a month ago
I had not known of her. She sounds remarkable.
All of you folk that have been in the trenches for so many years - we owe you a huge debt of gratitude.
Thank you so much.
Reply
Good Ole Mitch
a month ago
What an Amazing Woman!...the world is definitely a lesser place without her. Best thoughts & condolences for the family.
Peace
Reply
Lionheart
a month ago
First time hearing about Sue Collins, she sounded like a wonderful woman. Prays to her family and thank her for giving parents vaccination choice and helping maintain both medical and religious exemptions in NJ.
She appear so young to have passed.
Reply
Jennifo
a month ago
So sorry to hear that. These freedom fighters sure seem to be dying fairly often & it makes me go hmmmmm (Burt Berkson, Collins, Rashid Buttar).
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CastleConnell
a month ago
Condolences!
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